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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted of a college faculty of 253 to assess faculty attitudes toward governance, teaching, curriculum and students. A modified, abbreviated form of the Carnegie Foundation Faculty Survey was developed. The response rate was 67%. Results included the following: (1) 67% indicated that their writing had been published, or their creative work exhibited or performed, within the last 5 years; (2) 62% indicated that they had presented a paper or served on a panel in the last 5 years; (3) faculty participation in campus governance appeared to be substantial. Significant differences in the perceptions of the quality of the professional environment between faculty in the School of Arts and Sciences and in the School of Professional Studies and Education; and (4) ratings of the teaching role were more favorable than ratings of other aspects of the professional environment. Findings were compared to selected findings of the Carnegie Foundation 1984 Faculty Survey. Patterns of responses of the local faculty reflected those of the national groups in several areas, including ratings of their departments and institutions; however, professional commitments, participation in governance, and perceived departmental influence were greater for local faculty than for the national groups. Contains 18 references. (KM)

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FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF THE INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT: THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A FACULTY SURVEY

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This paper was presented at the Twenty-Ninth Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research held at the Omni Inner Harbor Hotel and the Lord Baltimore Hotel, Baltimore, Maryland, April 30 - May 3, 1989. This paper was reviewed by the AIR Forum Publications Committee and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC Collection of Forum Papers.

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FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF THE INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT: THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A FACULTY SURVEY

A survey was conducted to assess faculty attitudes toward governance, teaching, curriculum, and students. A modified, abbreviated form of The Carnegie Foundation Faculty Survey was developed. Pertinent issues were addressed to ensure the design of an appropriate instrument, to provide a frame of reference for the interpretation of local data, and to communicate the findings to an institutional constituency. Results of a discriminant analysis showed a significant separation between faculty divisions. Further, responses for the total faculty group reflected those of national groups, although professional commitments, participation in governance, and perceived departmental influence were greater for local faculty than for faculty at the national level.

In recent years, an emergent area of concern to researchers and planners is the impact of declining enrollments on faculty vitality. Specifically, institutional researchers have expressed concerns about maintaining faculty vitality in light of decreased enrollments, limited demands for certain academic programs, and limited advancement opportunities for an older faculty (Blackburn and Lawrence, 1986; Bruss and Kutina, 1981; Rose and Hample, 1981; Schmidtlein, 1985). As noted by Corcoran and Clark (1984): "--- faculty vitality is so central to institutional vitality that colleges and universities do need to understand how their policies impact it" (p. 151).

Surveys of appropriate groups may provide meaningful information about faculty vitality if, as researchers have noted, consideration is given to various technical issues, e.g., survey design, sampling procedures, instrument development, data analysis (Muffo and McLaughlin, 1987; Nichols, 1989; Schiltz, 1988). Yet, in recent years relatively few large-scale studies in this area have been implemented. Notable exceptions include systematic investigations that have been conducted at the University of Minnesota. In this regard, Willie and Stecklein (1982) surveyed faculty to assess professional activities and career satisfaction; Corcoran and Clark (1984) studied career socialization patterns using an institutional case study approach. Although these studies were of considerable scope and assessed many pertinent issues, the findings may not be generalizable to diverse postsecondary institutions.

On the other hand, in 1984 The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching sponsored a national survey of faculty in colleges and universities throughout the United States. Opinion Research Corporation was commissioned to design and execute the 1984 study and to compare the findings to those obtained in an earlier survey (Boyer, 1987; Opinion Research Corporation, 1984). In view of the fact that the 1984 faculty questionnaire was administered to a large, representative national sample and that results were tabulated by institutional type, the findings are generalizable to diverse postsecondary populations. Therefore, The Carnegie Foundation 1984 Survey of Faculty appears to be an appropriate instrument to utilize, with perhaps some local modifications, to assess faculty vitality at public and private colleges; comprehensive and research-oriented institutions.

METHOD

Development of the Instrument

In order to obtain useful information for an institutional self-study, a survey was conducted to assess faculty perceptions of the institutional environment at Jersey City State College, an urban four-year public college located in northern New Jersey. To provide a meaningful frame of reference for the interpretation of local data, the 1984 National Survey of Faculty, devised by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, was

selected as a model for the local study. Permission to utilize this instrument was received from The Carnegie Foundation.

An abbreviated, modified version of The Carnegie Foundation Faculty Survey was utilized, for several reasons. First, many of the 74 questionnaire items required multiple responses; consequently, the length of the questionnaire may not have encouraged a large, representative response rate. Additionally, in view of the national scope of The Carnegie Foundation Survey, some of the items had limited relevance for a four-year public urban college that honors specific contractual faculty agreements. Therefore, a sampling of items, judged to be appropriate at the local level, was selected; some new items were constructed to reflect the college organizational structure and the non-traditional student enrollment; and the survey format was adapted to local scoring needs. An initial draft was prepared by the Director of Institutional Research and was submitted to senior academic administrators and the faculty union representative. Following an item review by this latter group of faculty and staff, i.e., The College President, The Academic Vice President, The Assistant Academic Vice President, and The President of the American Federation of Teachers Local, several additions, deletions, and revisions were made.

The final instrument consisted of 40 objective items, which assessed professional commitments, governance and curricular issues as well as perceptions of the quality of the professional environment at Jersey City State College. Included in this

latter category were 16 survey items, subdivided for purposes of analysis into three subgroupings, i.e., current assessments (5 items); retrospective assessments (4 items); and perceptions of the college teaching role (7 items). Ratings were obtained on a four-point scale for current assessments and perceptions of the college teaching role; on a five-point scale, for retrospective assessments.

Procedures

In February, 1988, survey materials were mailed to the 253 regular college faculty, who were requested to complete the questionnaire anonymously. Included in the mailings were the following items: a questionnaire booklet, #2 pencil, an NCS answer sheet that could be scanned on the College optical mark reader, and a postage-paid return envelope. One month later, a reminder notice to the faculty was placed in the weekly publication that is distributed to all faculty through interoffice mail.

Responses to the survey items were analyzed separately for faculty affiliated with the School of Arts and Sciences and the School of Professional Studies and Education. In view of the fact that ratings of the quality of the professional environment can provide meaningful information about faculty vitality on a divisional and institutional basis, a comprehensive analysis in this area was conducted. Mean ratings of the 16 aspects of the

professional environment were computed. Additionally, to assess possible differences among items and between groups, a discriminant analysis was conducted. As noted by Nunnally (1967), this procedure is useful in distinguishing between groups on the basis of a combination of variables when the groups have been defined a priori. Finally, to establish a frame of reference for the interpretation of local data, selected findings were compared with those of national faculty groups.

RESULTS

Response Rate and Validity Indices

Of the 253 regular College faculty who received the survey materials, 169 (67%) completed the questionnaire. The distribution of survey respondents by school, rank, and tenure status was compared with the total faculty distribution to assess the representativeness of the faculty sample. Results of this analysis are reported in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Distributions of Respondents and Total Faculty By School, Rank, and Tenure

Variable	Survey Respondents N	%	Total Faculty N	%
School				
Arts and Sciences	127	75%	188	74%
Prof. Studies and Ed.	42	25%	65	26%
Rank				
Instructor	3	2%	8	3%
Assistant Prof.	54	32%	90	35%
Associate Prof.	56	33%	75	30%
Professor	56	33%	80	32%
Tenure	150	89%	213	84%

As shown above, the distribution of respondents by school, rank, and tenure status was nearly comparable to that of the total College faculty. Consequently, the large, representative sample provides some evidence for the validity of the faculty survey.

Professional Interests and Curricular Assessments

Several items included in The Carnegie Foundation Survey to assess faculty research interests were modified to reflect the emphasis placed on research at comprehensive public colleges. In response to the local items developed in this area, 67% of the faculty indicated that their professional writing had been published, or their creative work,

exhibited/performed within the last five years; 62%, that they had presented a paper or served on a panel at a professional conference within the last five years; 27%, that they had obtained a sponsored research grant within the last five years. Faculty interests on a more broadly-based level were also assessed. In this regard, when asked to indicate the importance of five professional areas, the faculty cited, in descending order, the students, the academic discipline, the department, the college, and, last, professional organizations. With respect to assessments of the undergraduate curriculum, 80% of the faculty reported that requirements for the major were "about right"; somewhat smaller proportions, that electives and general education requirements were "about right." Alternative assessments generally indicated "too little" rather than "too much" with respect to curricular policies.

Departmental and Institutional Governance

Faculty participation in campus governance appeared to be substantial. In this regard, the vast majority reported that they had served on departmental faculty committees and on campus-wide faculty committees; approximately two-thirds, in the Faculty Senate and on campus-wide administrative committees. Faculty attitudes toward campus governance suggested divergent views of departmental and institutional issues. Whereas the vast majority of faculty judged their influence on departmental

policies to be substantial and perceived the administration of their department to be democratic, relatively few indicated substantial influence on institutional policies or judged the administration of the institution to be essentially democratic.

Assessments of the Quality of the Professional Environment

Mean ratings of the 16 aspects of the professional environment were computed for faculty in the School of Arts and Sciences and the School of Professional Studies and Education. Additionally, a discriminant analysis was conducted to determine if the two faculty groups could be distinguished based on their responses to items in this latter area. Centroids were computed to indicate the mean discriminant scores of the Arts and Sciences and Professional Studies and Education groups. The centroids were 0.2905 and -0.9423, respectively. To determine if the separation of the groups was significant, the Wilks' lambda was computed. Results indicated that there was a significant separation between the two groups, F (16,152) = 2.426, $p < .01$. Correlation coefficients were computed to assess the relative contribution of each variable to the discriminant function.

Mean scores and discriminant function correlations are displayed in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Mean Scores and Discriminant Function Correlations: Faculty Ratings of Professional Environment (N=169)

Item	Mean Arts & Sc.	Mean PS&E	Mean Total	Correlation[a]
Current Assessments				
Intellectual Environ.: Institution	3.08	2.81	3.02	0.38
Intellectual Environ.: Department	2.53	2.38	2.49	-0.04
Faculty: Student Ratio	2.26	2.24	2.25	-0.01
Faculty Relations	2.50	2.62	2.53	-0.28
Student Abilities	3.13	2.81	3.06	0.33
Retrospective Assessments				
Faculty: Student Ratio	2.74	2.86	2.78	-0.14
Department Morale	3.48	3.65	3.51	-0.55
Student Job Prospects	2.78	2.11	2.62	0.84
Library Holdings	2.89	2.86	2.89	-0.27
College Teaching Role				
Student Appreciation	1.63	1.46	1.59	-0.20
Student: Faculty Contact	1.69	1.43	1.63	0.24
Teacher: Urban College	1.64	1.41	1.59	-0.04
Professional Development	1.84	1.84	1.84	-0.34
Greater Job Interest	2.40	2.03	2.31	0.32
Choice: College Teacher	1.71	1.46	1.65	0.14
Choice: Institution	2.00	1.70	1.93	0.07

[a]Correlation: item with discriminant function

As indicated in Table 2, faculty ratings of the teaching role were more favorable than ratings of other aspects of the professional environment. Within each item cluster, favorable ratings were given most frequently by the total faculty for the faculty: student ratio (current assessments); student job prospects (retrospective assessments); student appreciation and urban college teaching (college teaching role). Differences between the two faculty groups were revealed by the discriminant analysis and results, presented in the correlation column of Table 2. As shown, the variable which correlated most highly with the function was student job prospects; departmental morale and, to a lesser extent, the institutional intellectual environment, made moderate contributions; whereas the other variables made smaller contributions to group differences.

The above results indicate that the faculty groups could be distinguished primarily on the basis of student job prospects. In this regard, faculty in the School of Professional Studies and Education held more favorable attitudes toward student job prospects than did faculty in the School of Arts and Sciences.

Comparison of National and Local Data

Selected findings of The Carnegie Foundation 1984 Faculty Survey were reported for various institutional groups (Boyer, 1987). This information provided a meaningful frame of reference for the interpretation of local survey findings. Comparative data are summarized in Table 3.

TABLE 3. Comparison of National and Local Faculty Groups on Governance: Attitudes and Participation

Statement/Activity	Faculty Group: National: All Inst. % Agreement	National: Public Inst. % Agreement	Local: JCSC % Agreement
My college is "very important" to me.	26%	23%	53%
My department is "very important" to me.	40%	40%	63%
My academic discipline is "very important" to me.	76%	77%	81%
My department is "somewhat" or "very" autocratic.	31%	33%	15%
This institution is "somewhat" or "very" autocratic.	67%	69%	74%
I have "a great deal of" or "quite a bit" of opportunity to influence the policies of my department.	59%	56%	71%
I have "a great deal of" or "quite a bit" of opportunity to influence the policies of my institution.	12%	10%	7%
Participation in Faculty Senate	56%	51%	68%
Participation in Campus-wide Faculty Committees	69%	67%	88%
Participation in Administrative Advisory Committees	53%	52%	66%

Table 3 provides comparative data for Jersey City State College faculty and two groups of respondents to The Carnegie Foundation 1984 Faculty Survey, i.e., faculty at public institutions and at all postsecondary institutions combined. Ratings of three professional areas of interest showed a comparable rank order of priorities for all faculty, i.e., in descending order, the academic discipline, the department, and the college. However, larger proportions of local faculty cited the importance of these professional areas than was the case for the national faculty groups. With regard to participation in governance, the majority of faculty in all groups indicated participation in administrative advisory committees, the Faculty Senate, and, particularly, campus-wide faculty committees. However, greater proportions of local faculty reported participation in all governance activities than was the case for the national faculty groups. The pattern of responses for local faculty also reflected those of the national groups with respect to perceptions of departmental and college governance. The vast majority perceived a relatively democratic administration of their department; a relatively autocratic administration of the institution. Further, the majority of faculty in all groups indicated opportunities to influence the policies of their department; relatively few, opportunities to influence the policies of the institution.

DISCUSSION

The comparison of local and national survey data provided a useful frame of reference for the assessment of faculty attitudes at Jersey City State College. In this regard, data showed that local faculty interests and participation in governance surpassed those of national groups. These findings contributed to an enhanced faculty self-image. Additionally, negative perceptions of institutional governance were ameliorated by the fact that few faculty at the local or national level perceived their influence on institutional policies to be substantial.

The design, implementation, and findings of the faculty survey were described in a written report, which was prepared by the Director of Institutional Research. In this report, the assistance provided by the faculty and staff was acknowledged, and the data, presented in narrative and tabular format. A four-page summary of the methodology and survey findings was also written and was placed at the beginning of the document. By including an extended abstract, it was possible to present the salient points of the study in a meaningful way, and to adhere to two of the "maxims" put forth by Hackman (1983): "more may not be better" (p. 196) and "chunk your data wisely" (p. 199). Consequently, the grand summary contributed considerably to the usefulness of the faculty survey for planning purposes.

The report was widely disseminated throughout the college community and was distributed to the Board of Trustees,

managerial-level administrators, department Chairpersons, union and faculty Senate leaders, as well as self-study committee Chairs. The study generated considerable discussion and fostered a greater understanding of faculty attitudes toward a variety of academic issues. In so doing, the study served a broadly-based function of institutional research, i.e., to generate information that is useful for planning and policy making (Ewell, 1984; Ewell and Lisensky, 1988; Saupe, 1981; Sheehan, 1984; Tetlow, 1983).

Although the survey was conducted to assess faculty perceptions of the institutional environment at Jersey City State College, a public four-year college, the study may be implemented effectively at other postsecondary institutions, if researchers adhere to the basic survey model described in this paper. In this regard, it is essential to involve the faculty and staff in the survey design; to select an appropriate nationally-administered instrument to provide a suitable frame of reference for the interpretation of local data; and to communicate the findings in a succinct way to members of the college community. As a result it will be possible to obtain a meaningful assessment of faculty vitality at diverse postsecondary institutions and to utilize the results for planning and policy making.

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